What is a typical British summer?

21 August 2012 - After the warmest day of the year at the weekend, this week has seen a return to more typical British summer weather of sunshine and showers - but what is typical for the UK?

As our climate pages say, "the UK is well known for the variability of its weather - from day to day, season to season, year to year and place to place."

Its position where cold air from the Arctic and warm air from the tropics meet, combined with the influence of mainland Europe to the east and the Atlantic to the west all play a major role in this.

It means we can see shifts between warm, dry and settled weather to cooler, wet and unsettled weather in short periods of time. The general weather we would normally expect between any extremes would be the usual 'sunshine and showers' mix that we have seen plenty of this year.

This week is a good example of the general mix. Saturday saw the hottest day of the year so far (with with 32.4 °C recorded at Cavendish, Suffolk), while this week we have seen sunshine and showers, and we expect more unsettled weather to move in for the end of the week. You can stay up to date with our online forecast for the latest outlook.

All this variable weather is reflected in the 30-year climate averages which are used to determine what an 'average' summer is for the UK as a whole and its regions.

Temperature

The average maximum temperature for the UK in summer is 18.3 °C, but there are some wide variations within that - with the South of England average being 20.4 °C and Scotland being 16.1 °C, for example. Average minimums are similarly mixed, with 9.8 °C for UK again reflecting some variations.

Rainfall

Rainfall follows a similar theme, with an average of 226.9 mm of rain for the UK. Generally speaking it is wetter the further north and west you go, and drier further south and east. In terms of the number of days it actually rains, there are on average about 33 days where it rains more than 1 mm - so we'd expect it to rain slightly more than one day in three.

Sunshine

We expect about 510 hours of sunshine for the whole summer, so about five and a half hours a day.

Of course all these are averages, and we don't expect every summer to be average - we will get extremes of temperature, rainfall, and sunshine fairly regularly.

It's too early to say how this summer will rate in the national record books which date back to 1910, but with just over a week of meteorological summer to go (June-August), it's fair to say this year has seen some disappointing spells.

You can check our climate pages next month to see the full summer statistics for this year, or find out a host of information about climate for the UK and in your region.

Contact information

Met Office Press Office: **+44 (0)1392 886655**

E-mail: Press Office

Met Office Customer Centre: **01392 885680**

If you're outside the UK: **+44 1392 885680**

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